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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 499th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 16 October 1995, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. KAMAL (Pakistan)

Chairman: Mr. LARSEN (Denmark)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN declared open the forty-sixth session of the Executive Committee.

STATEMENT BY THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking as outgoing Chairman of the forty-fifth session, said that several positive developments could be noted in the current refugee situation, since solutions to long-standing refugee problems were being reached in the cases of Angola and Liberia. The international community had, moreover, not been confronted by major new refugee crises in 1955. The positive aspects were, however, clouded by certain persistent crises that posed some of the most complex assistance and protection challenges faced by UNHCR, notably the situation in Yugoslavia and in the Great Lakes region (Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire).

3. The fundamental challenge of recent refugee crises was how to bring about the sustainable reintegration of refugees in their country of origin. Major tasks facing UNHCR were the repatriation of Afghan refugees from neighbouring countries and, in Africa, the repatriation of almost 2 million Rwandan refugees. UNHCR might also soon be called upon to oversee repatriation and reintegration in the difficult circumstances of the former Yugoslavia. The protection and assistance aspects of reintegration in post-conflict situations should remain a primary concern for the members of the Executive Committee.

4. Viewing the United Nations from the vantage point of New York could be conducive to developing a broader perspective on the issues confronting the Organization. It was faced with an acute financial crisis in which some major contributors were defaulting on their assessed contributions and appeared to be making their payments contingent on the radical reform and restructuring of an organization which they viewed as bloated and inefficient.

5. It might be asked whether the necessary reform should be forced by depriving the United Nations of funds. Similarly, at what stage would the Organization be told that it was a suitably reformed entity and merited payments to which it was legally entitled? The overall trend was clear; the financial crisis of the United Nations would not end soon.

6. That situation had serious implications for agencies like UNHCR, which would sooner or later face a significant decline in resources. Efforts would have to be made to preempt criticism by taking steps to increase efficiency, while UNHCR's achievements and indispensability in a troubled world would have to be brought out more vigorously.

7. UNHCR's efficiency could be enhanced first of all if it abided by a cardinal principle of good management, that of comparative advantage. It should continue to concentrate on the tasks it performed best while certain functions could be usefully subcontracted to non-governmental organizations working in the same areas. Secondly, it should make use of the tools of the twentieth century to increase productivity through increased investments in

computer-based information technologies and an emphasis on staffing by persons adept at using them in order to improve the flow of information between Headquarters, field operations and national Governments. The results, in terms of quicker decision-making and decreased costs of field operations, could be dramatic.

8. Serious thought was also required on the conceptual underpinnings of assistance for refugee crises, which were bound to increase in the coming years. The solution lay in resolving the factors that led to refugee movements rather than concentrating on palliative assistance. Foremost among those factors were disputes that could erupt into full-blown conflicts, which, although the international community generally had time to resolve them, were allowed to fester, with tragic results. While UNHCR could not have a direct role in settling those disputes, it could prompt the international community to take action and, more specifically, identify conflict situations which might lead to refugee crises and urge the United Nations to take measures to prevent them.

9. Other factors in refugee crises - poverty, environmental degradation famines and epidemics - needed to be tackled head on. Common to those factors was the larger question of development. The international community should implement its commitments to ensure the development of peoples in all regions of the world and UNHCR should play an active role in informing the international community of the linkages between underdevelopment and refugee crises. Progress in dealing with the root causes of the movement of refugees would ensure that the international community would not repeatedly be faced with the endless reproach of not having done enough.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (item 2 of the provisional agenda)

10. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Chairman.

11. Mr. SPIEGEL (United States of America) nominated Mr. Larsen (Denmark).

12. Mr. ENDO (Japan) and Mr. ALGABSHAWI (Sudan) seconded the nomination.

13. Mr. Larsen (Denmark) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

14. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Vice-Chairman.

15. Mr. YIMER (Ethiopia) nominated Mr. Mchumo (United Republic of Tanzania).

16. Mr. WILLIAMS (United Kingdom) and Mr. RAO (India) seconded the nomination.

17. Mr. Mchumo (United Republic of Tanzania) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

18. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Rapporteur.

19. Ms. BAUTISTA (Philippines) nominated Mr. Chinwanno (Thailand).

20. Mr. HOFSTEE (Netherlands) seconded the nomination.

21. Mr. Chinwanno (Thailand) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

22. Mr. Larsen (Denmark) took the chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

23. The CHAIRMAN said that, during the past year, there had been a widening of the already too numerous situations of man-made conflicts leading to ever larger numbers of refugees, displaced persons and others in need of help. According to UNHCR's figures, the total number of persons of concern to the organization had reached 27.4 million at the end of 1994 and had continued to increase despite the fact that it had been possible to reverse the trend in many countries and to initiate voluntary repatriation for many thousands of refugees. In many parts of the world, however, endeavours to help refugees go back to their countries of origin had produced only feeble results. Worse than that, violent conflicts had developed or increased, for example, in the Great Lakes region and in the former Yugoslavia, with millions of new refugees and displaced persons. All of that underlined the very heavy tasks facing UNHCR, but also the need for decisions and support on the part of the international community at large - and not least on the part of the Executive Committee.

24. Referring to the issue of international protection and to the Note contained in document A/AC.96/850 he said that one of the pertinent issues was how far beyond the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol and existing regional conventions Member States would be prepared to go to ensure the effective international protection of refugees. While most countries were positive when it came to pragmatic and flexible approaches, it seemed less clear to what extent agreement would be possible on establishing guiding principles to enhance the objective of protection above and beyond legal obligations. In any case, UNHCR had made it clear that it would continue to promote and encourage the positive regional development of standards in conformity with international instruments.

25. A second protection issue was the burden on many first-asylum countries hosting large refugee populations. While conventions and regional instruments obliged host countries to receive refugees, their capacity was under very heavy strain in situations of mass influx of refugees and, so far, international solidarity and support for those countries had not been sufficient. UNHCR had rightly underlined that many low-income developing countries, whose resources were already strained, faced destabilizing social and economic effects from a sudden mass influx of refugees. Projects aimed essentially at preparing or improving a host country's economic or social infrastructure to help it cope with the presence of refugees should, as a rule, be handled by UNDP and other development organizations. Sufficient funding and assistance had, however, not been forthcoming in that respect. Those issues and efforts to seek solutions were relevant and urgent for UNHCR and the Executive Committee.

26. A third issue of concern to the Executive Committee was the staggering number of internally displaced persons in their countries of origin and the efforts and problems relating to voluntary repatriation, reintegration and reconstruction. UNHCR had the leading role and responsibility in repatriation and reintegration, a responsibility which would be relevant when it became possible to repatriate and reintegrate refugees from the former Yugoslavia, for example. UNHCR was also being called upon to provide assistance to certain groups of the many millions of internally displaced people around the world. While that was right and necessary in situations of conflict and when it came to reconciliation and reintegration of displaced persons elsewhere in their country, other organizations, within and outside the United Nations, must gradually take over lead agency responsibilities from UNHCR in the reintegration and reconstruction phases, something which was not currently the case. In that connection, it was relevant to mention resolution 1995/56 adopted by the Economic and Social Council in July 1995 on the question of the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, which urged the governing bodies of the appropriate agencies to review in the coming two years their respective roles and responsibilities in the various phases of humanitarian assistance. That request was, of course, also addressed to the Executive Committee of UNHCR.

27. When discussing the role of UNHCR, the increased demands on the organization and the problems of responsibilities of other organizations, it might be asked whether UNHCR would soon be overextending its capacities and capabilities; whether, with even more numerous activities, it could continue to count on the necessary funding from donor countries; and whether, with constantly growing responsibilities, it could continue to perform as ably and effectively as it had done so far.

28. He foresaw an enhanced role for the Executive Committee, partly because of the increased crisis situations of concern to UNHCR, but also because of the Committee's expected endorsement of the recommendations and conclusions adopted by the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters on Executive Committee working methods (EC/SC.2/76) and on its informal consultations on budgetary questions (EC/SC.2/75 and Corr.1). Some of the innovations that would lead to an enhanced role for the Executive Committee and its planned new Standing Committee were that the latter would be authorized to take various decisions hitherto reserved for the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the agendas of the annual sessions of the Executive Committee would be reformed to ensure more focused policy discussion and effective decision-making and there would be a focused annual theme for debate at each session, selected by the Standing Committee well in advance.

29. The conclusions of the consultations on budgetary questions provided the High Commissioner with the necessary flexibility to respond effectively to needs and also, in a limited way, made it possible, on approval by the Executive Committee, to enhance that flexibility through increases in and extended use of the resources and allocations for voluntary repatriation established within the General Programmes. Of similar importance were the various conclusions which increased the Executive Committee's possibilities of exercising governance and oversight and which provided for regular and more in-depth reviews of General and Special Programmes at inter-sessional meetings of the Committee. That was in line with the appeals by many member States for

greater transparency, accountability and oversight. The implementation of the recommendations and conclusions by the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters would lead to progress and enhanced efficiency both for UNHCR and for the Executive Committee.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

30. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) extended a special welcome to the delegations of Bangladesh, India and the Russian Federation, which were present in the Executive Committee for the first time. She also welcomed the special guest of the Executive Committee, Salim A. Salim, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), whose presence attested to the close cooperation which the OAU and UNHCR had enjoyed for more than a quarter of a century and was also indicative of the importance of Africa to the work of her Office. Africa hosted more refugees and internally displaced persons than any other continent and was also the scene of voluntary repatriation. Of the nearly 2 million refugees who had returned home in 1994, 1.5 million were in Africa. Out of 18 planned repatriations in 1996, 9 were foreseen in Africa. She counted on the OAU's conflict resolution mechanism and its leadership to help create and maintain the momentum of the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

31. UNHCR had been confronted with massive emergencies every year since 1991, when she had become High Commissioner. In recent weeks, almost half a million people had been displaced by war and violence in the former Yugoslavia. In a world in which war deliberately targeted civilians and peace failed to bring security, UNHCR's dual mandate of international protection and solutions had been severely tested during the past year in almost every region. In the aftermath of the emergency in the Great Lakes region of Africa, UNHCR had sought to respond to the strong pressure for early return, while continuing to take care of 2 million refugees and remaining vigilant to new risks of displacement. In Angola, it had launched an operation to assist some 311,000 refugees to return home by mid-1997. In the Sudan, it had embarked on voluntary repatriation to Eritrea and Ethiopia. In West Africa, it had tried to nurture solutions. In contrast, in South-East Asia, Central America, Tajikistan and Mozambique, where solutions had taken root successfully, it had grappled with ways to phase down or move out. In the Middle East, it had been encouraged by the evolution of peace and remained ready to play its role in line with its mandate and in cooperation with other organizations. Elsewhere, the picture had been mixed. In Afghanistan, renewed violence had set back the flow of repatriation. In the former Yugoslavia, peace talks had offered the first glimmer of hope in months, although she feared that, in the short term, there could be more displacement as people were forced to move to accommodate territorial adjustments.

32. The thrust of those various developments had been to put the issue of solutions and, more precisely, repatriation, even higher on UNHCR's agenda. One important statistic showed the extent to which it had shifted from a bias towards exile to a focus on the country of origin. Of the 27.4 million persons currently of concern to UNHCR, only about 14.5 million were refugees.

The rest included 4 million returnees, 5.4 million internally displaced persons and 3.5 million civilians affected by conflict. Almost half of the population of concern to UNHCR was thus to be found within their own country.

33. While the number of refugees had declined, the numbers and categories of those in need of international protection and assistance were in fact expanding. They illustrated the fact that the pursuit of solutions without regard to protection would not go far and that international protection was a more complex task than merely assuring asylum. The two arms of her mandate were fundamentally linked. The objective of protection must be not to perpetuate exile, but to encourage solutions. If solutions were not approached from the perspective of protection - if they failed to protect the basic human rights of individuals - then they would be neither effective nor permanent. Extending from flight through exile to return and reintegration, protection principles provided the over-arching framework for the prevention and solution of refugee problems.

34. Regarding UNHCR's efforts to develop a new paradigm of protection oriented towards solutions, she asked how UNHCR could seize the political impulse for solutions while retaining the humanitarian imperative for protection. What were the prospects and the possibilities which inspired it and the dilemmas and difficulties confronting it? Externally, what were the partnerships it must cultivate? Internally, what were the management priorities and structures it must establish?

35. One of the most difficult problems UNHCR had had to face in recent years had been the decline of asylum, even on a temporary basis. Many countries were openly admitting their weariness with large numbers of refugees and blatantly closing borders. Others were more insidiously introducing laws and procedures that effectively denied admission to their territory. The year 1995 had been particularly significant in that developments in the Great Lakes region had demonstrated that even the proverbial African generosity towards refugees had become strained. The threat to asylum had taken on a global character, affecting both the developing and the developed world. International protection reflected the convergence of humanitarian and political interests. In many circumstances, asylum was not only the most powerful tool of protection, but also the most pragmatic, especially when provided on a temporary basis. That was why UNHCR had requested Governments to provide temporary protection to those fleeing the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and had urged them to continue it for the time being. The possibility of temporary asylum encouraged a phased and orderly approach to repatriation, thereby assuring greater stability for peace and progress in the country of origin. She called on the Committee to support UNHCR's endeavours to ensure respect for the institution of asylum, at least on a temporary basis, for those fleeing persecution, conflict and civil strife. The decline of asylum could not be arrested simply by appealing to the generosity of States, however. It must be addressed by action to enable countries to receive refugees and by initiatives to find solutions to refugee problems and, where possible, to prevent the outbreak of new crises.

36. Peoples and Governments around the world had shown and continued to show remarkable hospitality to millions of refugees, despite their own political, social, economic and environmental constraints. The costs of hosting large

numbers of refugees were not always measurable in monetary terms. UNHCR's refugee assistance did not redress the collateral impact of refugees on the host countries. If Governments were to continue to grant asylum, greater attention must be given by the international community to addressing the concerns of affected host communities and strengthening their capacity and willingness to cope with population movements.

37. One area that had attracted attention in recent years was the environmental damage caused by large concentrations of refugee populations. In the light of those concerns, UNHCR was proposing a reformulation of its environmental policy in order to make the environmental dimension an integral part of its operations. Nor could the security implications of large-scale refugee outflows be ignored, as they underscored both the decline of asylum and the drive towards solutions. Insecurity in refugee camps was a matter not only of law and order, but also of maintaining the civilian character of the camps, which was a fundamental principle of international protection. Although the primary obligation lay with the authorities granting asylum, UNHCR would do whatever it could within its mandate and in line with its expertise to help ensure respect for the principle, including seeking the relocation of camps if necessary.

38. Increased assistance to host countries alone, however, would not meet the demands of maintaining asylum. Whether in South-East Asia or Central Africa, the Caribbean or the Balkans, the universal reality was that protection abroad could not be assured without a parallel effort to find solutions at home. As refugees grew more impatient to return home, as Governments became more reluctant to grant asylum and donors found other calls on their purses, how long could the world wait for solutions to materialize? What were the parameters of UNHCR's mandate to promote solutions and what were the challenges it faced in pursuing them? Anti-personnel mines were a major obstacle to return and she was therefore disappointed that the Review Conference of States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, held in Vienna from 25 September to 13 October 1995, had failed to make progress on that issue.

39. For UNHCR, the challenge of solutions lay in seizing the opportunities while remaining alert to the dangers, in ensuring that protection principles, and not political expediency, guided the pursuit of humanitarian solutions. Working closely with political and peace-keeping operations, for instance in Rwanda, Liberia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), it had sought to inject humanitarian concerns into the political discourse and to reinforce its capacity to carry out its protection and assistance activities. The partnership had been fruitful, but obviously the humanitarian and strategic objectives had not always coincided. The relationship, particularly with the military, had at times created pressures on its humanitarian mandate. In some cases, such as Angola and Tajikistan, UNHCR had reaped the benefits of its cooperation. In other cases, such as the Caucasus, humanitarian solutions had become hostage to the lack of progress and parallel political negotiations, although she believed the agency was playing a meaningful role in the subregion by assisting displaced populations.

The situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal continued to suffer from a stalemate, while repatriation to Afghanistan had stalled, prolonging the refugee burden of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Fresh strategies were needed to break the impasse.

40. Protection needs did not disappear when people repatriated; on the contrary, they tended to resurface in more complex forms in the country of origin, as the problem of the internally displaced had shown. That had given UNHCR's protection responsibilities a new dimension and had led it to interpret its mandate for solutions in a protection-oriented, but pro-active manner. Just as it no longer waited for refugees to cross the border, but was increasingly involved with the internally displaced in order to avert outflow, it could no longer passively wait for conditions to change so that refugees could volunteer to return. Instead, it must work actively to create the conditions conducive to their safe return. It was therefore important that the protection debate should move on from interpreting voluntary repatriation solely in terms of the expression of individual will to the creation of conditions of safety - in the refugee camps, in the reception centres and in the home areas.

41. Rwanda illustrated the dilemmas of that approach, but also the way in which UNHCR had sought to overcome them. It was clear that, in the longer term, the answer in the Great Lakes region lay in a comprehensive political solution. In the short term, however, she believed that progress on humanitarian issues through voluntary and safe return could contribute to the political process, while easing the humanitarian crisis. Although she had been disappointed at the failure to implement the Bujumbura Plan of Action adopted jointly by UNHCR and the OAU in February 1995, she believed that her recent mission, followed by the convening of the Tripartite Commission in Geneva in late September 1995, had helped to create a momentum towards voluntary repatriation. Zaire had made clear its intention to deal with those who blocked repatriation. Rwanda, for its part, had unequivocally recognized the right of the refugees to return and had expressed its commitment to improve the reception and security of returnees, including full access for international monitoring. It would clearly reassure the camp population if the Rwandese Government were to define the different levels of responsibility in the 1994 genocide and examine specific measures in response to lower levels of responsibility. She had been encouraged by the Government's declared intention to proceed along those lines.

42. In the former Yugoslavia, assisting the victims had never been an end in itself as far as UNHCR was concerned. Its goal was and remained to help them return safely to their homes or to find new homes for those for whom return was not feasible. She had recently reiterated UNHCR's willingness to promote the organized return of refugees and displaced persons, in keeping with its role as the United Nations lead humanitarian agency and in cooperation with its sister organizations. At the same time, she had stressed the importance of including humanitarian issues in the peace negotiations. People must not be used as pawns to further military and political interests; all returns must respect internationally accepted principles. The continued gross violations of human rights, ethnic cleansing and forcible return of refugees and

displaced persons underlined the importance of a firm commitment by all parties to human rights and humanitarian principles and of international monitoring to ensure their compliance.

43. International presence in the country of origin was an important confidence-building measure, both for returnees and for the internally displaced. It had been instrumental in persuading the refugees to return from Bangladesh to Myanmar. More than 200,000 refugees had returned home so far and she hoped that the remaining 50,000 would repatriate over the course of the coming months, allowing UNHCR to phase down in Bangladesh while maintaining its presence in the areas of origin in Myanmar until reintegration had been completed. Another example was Tajikistan, where UNHCR's mobile monitoring teams had helped to stabilize the areas of origin and encouraged the vast majority of the refugees and displaced persons to return home safely. UNHCR had closed the operation recently, successfully handing over the human rights aspects to the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the rehabilitation issues to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other development actors.

44. She welcomed the important operational role of United Nations human rights monitors as part of the collaborative effort to create safe conditions in countries such as Rwanda, El Salvador and Guatemala. However, the recent killing of returnees in Guatemala had underscored the difficulties of ensuring safety in the country of origin. She had noted the prompt action by the Government to prevent recurrences. Obviously, the success of a pro-active, solution-oriented approach was directly proportionate to the political commitment of the Governments concerned.

45. Viable solutions demanded that efforts to safeguard human rights should be parallelled by endeavours to rehabilitate socio-economic conditions. UNHCR had relied on the model of small, community-based "quick impact" projects to spark rehabilitation in situations as varied as Mozambique and Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Central America. Just as it had collaborated with political actors to ensure that humanitarian concerns were injected in the peace process, it had cooperated with development organizations such as UNDP and financial institutions such as the World Bank to incorporate its reintegration efforts into larger rehabilitation and development plans. However, as UNHCR tried to phase down in Mozambique, the challenge was to ensure that others would have a stake in the reintegration process and would continue once UNHCR had left. To further that goal, UNHCR was embarking on a consultative process with the World Bank to identify concrete strategies for specific countries.

46. At a time when development assistance was shrinking and humanitarian needs were expanding, a "third window" for financing emergency rehabilitation activities was needed. That would allow donors to channel resources from both humanitarian and development funds and enable organizations, whether humanitarian or development, to utilize them. In that way, both immediate rehabilitation and longer-term reconstruction needs could be addressed in the recovery process. The issue of resources was critical when it came to post-conflict rebuilding. It was therefore tragic that UNHCR's programme in Mozambique was among those most strapped for cash. Nothing was more critical,

however, than the funding shortfall of US$ 50 million for the Rwanda Burundi Emergency Operation, which left UNHCR with very little flexibility to adapt either to increased repatriation or to potential exodus.

47. The overall level of financial contributions to UNHCR for 1995 had nevertheless been impressive, totalling US$ 757 million, of which $296 million was for General Programmes. That was roughly equivalent to the pledges made at the same time in 1994. As UNHCR's total budget reached US$ 1.3 billion for the second consecutive year, she was the first to appreciate the enormity of the demands it continued to make on its donors, large and small.

48. The gap between expanding needs and limited resources highlighted the importance of a search for an effective strategy of prevention. In an effort to promote such an approach, UNHCR had moved towards greater involvement with the internally displaced, particularly in the CIS region. Within the framework of an inter-agency effort based on a clear division of responsibilities, it had successfully responded to the emergency needs of those displaced from the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation during the past year. Having boosted the local response capacity, UNHCR was now gradually phasing down its activities. True prevention meant strengthening the will and capacity of Governments to pre-empt the reasons that forced people to move. That was the underlying thrust of UNHCR's efforts in the CIS and the neighbouring countries, where it had embarked on an ambitious project to draw up a regional action plan to deal with past, present and potential displacement. Further to General Assembly resolution 49/173 of 23 December 1994, UNHCR, together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE, had organized several subregional meetings in preparation for the regional conference, hopefully to be held in mid-1996. The process was proving to be invaluable in developing a regional strategy to avert population displacement in a part of the world marked by ethnic tensions.

49. The challenge of prevention, as of solution, was ultimately protection. Early international presence could sometimes have a preventive impact, as had been UNHCR's experience in Tajikistan. However, in order to break the pattern of coerced displacement, the security of States must presuppose the security of people within those States. A major test for the coming decades would be to develop a humanitarian perspective of security. While UNHCR, with its limited mandate and resources, could make a modest contribution to that process, the primary responsibility for prevention, as for security, was clearly a political one.

50. The future of the United Nations would inevitably affect UNHCR, so UNHCR must prepare for a vigorous reappraisal of how it worked. For the coming year, four priorities should be set. First, protection policies and strategies must be revitalized, reflecting the dimension of solutions and responding to the needs of a growing range of beneficiaries. UNHCR was often being compelled to provide refuge in the midst of conflict and to promote repatriation in the midst of insecurity. How could protection strategies be reformulated to take account of those realities? How could UNHCR better help States, whether of asylum or origin, to meet their obligations in the light of those constraints? As a first step, UNHCR was setting up an internal working group to look at the problems in Africa; it hoped to undertake a similar

exercise also for Europe. Given the dominance of the domestic agenda in many countries, mobilizing public opinion as a tool of protection would be an important element of the strategy.

51. Secondly, UNHCR needed to rethink the way it planned. The dynamics of displacement today required a comprehensive and integrated planning approach - comprehensive in covering the sequence of refugee flows from prevention to emergency response to solutions, and integrated in bringing together the entire spectrum of issues and actors. Planning for partnership was vital. Given the multiplicity of organizations and agencies on the humanitarian scene today, UNHCR's objective was to increase the predictability of action for mutual support and thereby create a better basis for cooperation and coordination. It had strengthened its dialogue with the political and peace-keeping arms of the United Nations, cooperating with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) and with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and IOM in their respective areas. It had refined the concept of service packages with Governments, had further developed its operational agreement with the World Food Programme (WFP) and had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). She would also be signing an agreement with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) when she visited New York in November 1995. As for UNHCR's closest partners, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it was following up on the Partnership in Action (PARinAC) recommendations at the field level. The increasingly important role of regional organizations in peace-making had added a new dimension to UNHCR's partnership strategy, as had the growing interests of institutions such as the World Bank in refugee and returnee issues.

52. Thirdly, UNHCR must reinforce the proper implementation and monitoring of its policies, guidelines and programmes, which included its ability to monitor and control its implementing partners and was an important priority for the coming year. One area where the gap between policy and action had constantly attracted the Committee's attention was that of refugee women. UNHCR was introducing a number of specific measures to increase action and accountability, including additional resources for the field and stronger follow-up mechanisms at headquarters. Furthermore, she had decided to reform UNHCR's recruitment policies to give priority to women professional staff in order to try to reach parity by the year 2000.

53. Fourthly, UNHCR must restructure the way in which it worked so as to improve its delivery, accountability and performance and must build a capacity to contract and expand in response to operational demands. She had taken a number of steps to achieve that goal, including strengthening the top management. In an emergency-driven organization such as UNHCR, innovation could easily lapse into improvisation in the absence of a policy planning framework. That was why she had decided in 1994 to appoint a Director for Policy Planning and Operations and was currently requesting the creation of a post of Assistant High Commissioner at the Assistant Secretary-General level, to which she hoped the Committee would agree. Overseeing the Regional Bureaux, policy development and external relations and supported by a revamped research and information capacity drawn from existing resources, the Assistant High Commissioner would act as the fulcrum for an integrated approach to policy, planning and operations within UNHCR.

54. She had requested the Deputy High Commissioner to lead a management review of UNHCR's priorities, procedures and personnel in order to ascertain how best to improve delivery and increase productivity while reducing costs. Although the ratio of administrative costs between the field and headquarters had actually declined, UNHCR's expanding operations world wide had pushed its budget and staff to unsustainable levels. Initiatives to streamline management, increase delegation to the field and better utilize resources included preparing an information and communications system plan that would take UNHCR into the twenty-first century. She hoped that one important result of all those initiatives would be the down-sizing of headquarters and the redeployment or reduction of staff in the field, based on improved forward planning and prioritization. As new operations opened up, UNHCR must phase down elsewhere. It expected dramatic reductions in South-East Asia in 1996 and the comprehensive Plan of Action was in its final phase. However, some transitional arrangements might still be necessary to ensure the smooth conversion of the operation into a migration programme. The reform of UNHCR's human resources management, particularly the implementation of the management system and strengthening of staff training, remained high on her agenda. While retaining the core of its principles and the thrust of its strategy, UNHCR must continuously revitalize the way it thought and review the way it worked. Its goal was to be a slimmer, trimmer organization, responsive to emergency needs, aggressive in the search for solutions and committed to protection.

55. Mr. LEBEDEV (Russian Federation) thanked the High Commissioner for the warm greetings she had extended to his country on its accession to membership of the Executive Committee. The Russian Federation regarded the support given by a majority of countries for its candidacy as a sign of their confidence in its ability to help UNHCR discharge its mandate.

56. The Russian Federation shared UNHCR's commitment to providing protection and assistance to the world's refugees and undertook to assist UNHCR in carrying out its trying humanitarian task, which it frequently performed in complex circumstances. The Russian Federation recognized that new challenges arising from refugee flows threatened the implementation of UNHCR's strategy. It would assume its commitments under the 1951 Convention and under its own domestic legislation in order to implement that strategy multidimensionally.

57. His country appreciated the major role UNHCR was playing, in conjunction with IOM and OSCE, in solving the problems of refugees and other displaced persons in specific countries in transition. The process of addressing those issues would be a valuable experience and the Russian Federation was prepared to engage in further cooperation to streamline the international community's common policy and develop practical plans for the effective handling of handling of regional refugee crises.

58. Mr. SALIM (Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity) said it was no accident that Africa had the greatest number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, but the result of economic and other factors that had created unstable security environments which had led to mass displacements and refugees. The origin, age and gender of African refugees made them particularly vulnerable to the scourges that beset refugees and meant that they were sometimes the victims of irresponsible elements in the

asylum countries, of rigid local Government regulations and even of relief agencies. Those circumstances, which had made UNHCR's work in Africa even more complex, required the strengthening of its protection mission. The full cooperation of receiving countries had to be secured in order to ensure the physical safety of refugees and their basic right of asylum, together with their right to non-forcible return to their countries of origin. Refugees themselves were under an obligation to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their status in order to achieve the necessary balance between the rights and obligations of refugees and receiving communities.

84. The provision of food and of health and other facilities had to be both adequate and timely and should take account not only of the refugees' needs, but also those of recipient countries. Countries of asylum had continued to make huge sacrifices in order to meet the basic needs of refugees, despite the tremendous pressure caused by their arrival. In recent years, however, there had been disturbing signs of misunderstanding and tension between refugees and local populations and authorities which had sometimes degenerated into serious incidents that raised problems of security and posed a serious challenge to host countries and to the international community. Steps should be taken to prevent those tensions from escalating further in order to avoid eroding the very fabric of Africa's tradition of hospitality and brotherhood.

85. Ecological destruction and environmental degradation were among the consequences of the presence of refugees and displaced persons and they caused enormous long-term problems. In addition, hosting refugees meant sharing the scarce resources available for the local population and that could create enormous social and economic pressures within host communities. Serious consideration should be given by UNHCR and the international community to ways of ensuring that that burden was shared more equitably. A mutually supportive relationship should be developed between refugees and local communities and the benefits extended to refugees should also extend to the local population so as to promote mutual assistance, cooperation and trust. More resources in the form of food, medicines and money for infrastructure development should be made available to sustain refugee populations in their areas of settlement and prevent them from moving into areas where the local population lived.

86. If refugees in Africa were the most numerous, they were also often the least provided for. The level and rapidity of response to refugee emergencies in Africa had to be made comparable to those in the rest of the world in order to avoid giving the impression that standards of humanitarian relief and response levels were applied selectively to the detriment of African refugee emergencies.

87. The refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa was of monumental proportions not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of the underlying political difficulties. Zaire and Tanzania, respectively, hosted 1.5 million and 700 000 mainly innocent refugees, and that placed a heavy burden on the local communities. However, even a modest programme of voluntary repatriation was impossible as long as the refugees were subjected to the propaganda, manipulation and violence of the political and armed elements among them. Accordingly, it was important to provide relief and to separate the innocent from those who held them captive in order to allow those willing to return home to do so. The Government of Rwanda also had a

responsibility to do everything possible to create favourable conditions so that the refugees might return without fear and to provide for their resettlement and rehabilitation, a task it would be unable to assume without adequate and timely assistance from the international community.

63. In Africa, Governments had taken their responsibilities arising from the international conventions protecting refugees quite seriously, sometimes at great social and economic cost to their own peoples, who had been willing to welcome refugees and to share with them their food, facilities and even land. However, the seemingly permanent presence of the refugees and the mounting economic problems in asylum countries were placing a heavy strain on the sense of generosity and sacrifice. It was no longer possible to take African generosity for granted and countries such as Zaire and Tanzania required an understanding of the enormity of the problems they faced, together with additional assistance, in order to stop the spread of compassion fatigue among their own peoples.

64. The Organization of African Unity was working within the framework of the Plan of Action of the Bujumbura Regional Conference on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in the Great Lakes region and acknowledged that the refugee crisis in that region was partly a result of political conflict. It therefore recognized the need to link protection for refugees with efforts to address the underlying political problems. Rwanda needed the international community's full support to get back on its feet after the 1994 genocide and reconcile its people. Ensuring that the International Tribunal for Rwanda rapidly became operational would make it possible to satisfy the need of the victims of genocide for justice and allow the refugees to return to their country voluntarily. In Burundi, too, a political settlement and confidence-building were inextricably linked to the repatriation and resettlement of refugees and to national reconstruction.

65. After years of devastation by war, the beginnings of a return to peace and stability were visible in Angola and Liberia. Those countries' citizens who were scattered in exile needed assistance not only to return home, but also in the early stages of resettlement and even during the reconstruction stage. Although UNHCR perhaps lacked a mandate to go beyond protection and repatriation, the strong linkage between successful repatriation and sound resettlement and reconstruction policies was increasingly apparent. The need to accept a more dynamic interpretation of UNHCR's mandate had been emphasized by the limited security role it had assumed in the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire. Although that role was no substitute for a more robust role for the United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council, UNHCR had demonstrated that, where need was compelling, some adjustments in mandate were necessary. In his view it was now evident that UNHCR had to go beyond repatriation and concern itself with resettlement and reconstruction as a means of ensuring that refugees did not drift back to their erstwhile countries of asylum.

66. The Organization of African Unity was concerned that the problems of displaced persons had not attracted the requisite attention from the international community, since their suffering was no different from, and

occasionally worse, than that of refugees. There was an imperative need urgently to consider extending the same benefits of relief and humanitarian assistance given to refugees to the millions of internally displaced persons.

67. However, apart from considering how to provide relief and humanitarian assistance to Africa's displaced persons, there was a need to focus on the root causes of population displacement in order fully to assess its implications for the broader problems of Africa's socio-economic development. The issue of population displacement should be analysed in the context of the level of poverty that existed in Africa. While poverty begot conflicts, so too did conflicts beget poverty, and the improvement of Africa's socio-economic situation depended largely on the continent's capacity to break the vicious circle of poverty, conflicts, refugees and population displacements. Meaningful development in Africa meant improving socio-economic conditions so that people did not have to leave their countries of origin under the pretext that they were political refugees. Relentless efforts also had to be made to prevent conflict situations from erupting into full-fledged conflicts that caused massive population flows to areas of peace and stability.

68. With those considerations in mind, the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government had decided in June 1993 to establish the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within OAU, thereby recognizing the intrinsic relationship between conflicts and refugees. The aim had been to shift from ad hoc modalities of conflict resolution to a more permanent mechanism marking the emergence of a new institutional dynamism and situating the OAU at the centre of efforts to ensure conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa. The mechanism was assisted by the fundamental shift in Africa towards democracy, which, together with economic development, would be the long-term foundation of peace and a lasting panacea to the refugee problem.

69. Although the mandates of the OAU and UNHCR differed, their roles coincided in many ways. Both organizations had cooperated with and supported one another and he again expressed his gratitude to the High Commissioner and her staff for the operational logistical support they had given to the OAU mission in Burundi. Such links should be strengthened and expanded to enable UNHCR to give more effective support to Africa's efforts at conflict resolution within the framework of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and to achieve the critical mass necessary to find solutions to political problems which involved mass displacements of population.

70. A partnership had to be forged between the international community and the people of Africa, predicated on principles of international solidarity, cooperation and commitment in order better to cope with the refugee problem in Africa. The Organization of African Unity would continue to develop the awareness, and to mobilize the support, of the international community in order to respond more forcefully to the needs and aspirations of Africa's uprooted communities.

71. Post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation were costly and the destruction of infrastructure in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Somalia and Burundi pointed to the importance of peace-making and peace-building if massive expenditures on reconstruction and rehabilitation were to be avoided. There again, Africa required the solidarity and partnership of the international community. Africa was concerned about the diminishing external resources available both to meet the needs of refugees and to sustain long-term reconstruction and development. While it was understandable that the world was becoming fatigued by the persistence and gravity of Africa's problems, those problems needed special attention and resources because they were in a broader sense the problems of mankind. Donor fatigue and compassion fatigue could have catastrophic consequences for refugees.

72. Ms. OAKLEY (United States of America) congratulated the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on their election and welcomed the new members of the Executive Committee.

73. The world's humanitarian crises were in much the same state as at other recent sessions, with one enormous difference: there was hope that the most complex emergency of the 1990s - that in the former Yugoslavia - was at a turning point. The Executive Committee had long noted the need for political solutions in order to resolve humanitarian crises; so-called "exit strategies" for humanitarian programmes depended on successful political reconciliation strategies.

74. A settlement along the lines of the September 1995 agreements would initiate a new phase with added dimensions in international efforts. Redrawing the map of Bosnia and Herzegovina would lead to further population movements among Serbs, Croats and Muslims. Refugees and others currently receiving temporary protection in Western Europe would, ideally, return at later phases as local communities made progress in integrating new populations from within Bosnia. Throughout the process, the international community needed to remain fully cognizant of and ensure respect for the applicable international humanitarian and human rights standards. Resettlement to third countries might prove to be the best or only solution for especially vulnerable people from the former Yugoslavia. The United States had pledged to provide 50 per cent of the resettlement places for which UNHCR had indicated a need. To date, it had provided resettlement for over 19,000 Bosnian refugees.

75. Throughout the past four years, the High Commissioner had splendidly led the international humanitarian response to the crisis and the United States Government supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that UNHCR should retain its lead humanitarian agency role in the post-settlement period. Specifically, the United States hoped to see UNHCR assist local Governments in coping with the new population movements and support the affected populations; work with European Governments on the orderly return of persons from the region, whether to old or to new homes; identify and recommend to European and other resettlement countries cases for permanent resettlement for especially vulnerable persons; act as advocate for returning refugees and provide technical and legal assistance on refugee policy to all players; and design community-based integration projects to ease the transition.

76. In the case of West Africa, repatriation was the most effective solution, but it was possible only when political circumstances permitted a safe and dignified, voluntary return of refugees. Her Government was gratified by recent progress towards repatriation in Mali and Togo and, above all, by the prospects for true peace in Liberia which would enable thousands of displaced persons in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and inside Liberia itself to return to their homes. The United States had recently sent a team to Liberia to assess the needs and the best means by which it could cooperate to implement the Abuja accords and bring an end to a six-year nightmare. It looked forward to working with UNHCR on repatriation planning, as well as on the closing-out of maintenance programmes around the world.

77. Regarding South-East Asia, she drew attention to her Government's full and mutual diplomatic recognition of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. For the final phase of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), the continued active cooperation of the Vietnamese Government in supporting new ideas to promote the voluntary return of the remaining camp population of non-refugees was essential. Support by all concerned parties for NGO programmes providing opportunities for safe and humane repatriation and reintegration was also a vitally important element in bringing the CPA to an honourable conclusion.

78. The United States was unequivocal in its belief that return home was the sole remaining option for those now in camps in South-East Asia who had been found not to qualify as refugees. It continued to support voluntary repatriation as the preferred option and at the same time recognized the appropriateness of orderly return programmes under the CPA framework. After return to Viet Nam, some of the persons concerned might be eligible for resettlement abroad, under immigration or other humanitarian criteria established by individual countries. The United States was prepared to establish a new bilateral programme that would offer additional opportunities for future repatriates to be interviewed in Viet Nam for possible resettlement in the United States.

79. Concerning the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, virtually all travellers came to two conclusions: first, UNHCR and WFP were performing at a level of excellence and cooperation unprecedented in both size and scope; and, secondly, the current situation of the millions of refugees outside Rwanda and Burundi was simply unsustainable. It was hard to determine how the international community could effectively intervene to soften, and eventually dissolve, the ethnic hatred that continued to simmer in the region. The question to be asked of all Hutu and Tutsi leaders in Rwanda, Burundi and in refugee camps was whether they cared enough to work towards peace and reconciliation at the same time as they worked for justice.

80. A regionally agreed, comprehensive plan was essential in order to maintain asylum in the region, to create safe conditions for voluntary repatriation and to bring to justice those responsible for genocide and ongoing murderous violence. Ultimately, it was for the countries in the region to demonstrate an intention to work towards multiple goals that recognized the interests of all parties. She looked forward to discussions with individual delegations on that issue and felt that three elements were crucial to a successful repatriation of Rwandan refugees: first, returning

refugees must have confidence that they would have a safe place to live; secondly, intimidation in refugee camps must be stopped and their essential civilian character restored; and, thirdly, international assistance must emphasize repatriation as the highest priority.

81. The Secretariat composed of staff from UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and responsible for preparing the international conference on migration and refugee issues in the Commonwealth of Independent States had done an outstanding job. The United States looked forward to further good work by the Secretariat and encouraged the involvement of knowledgeable NGOs and other independent groups, especially those in the States of the region.

82. One of the three important management issues to be addressed was the reflection of policy goals in UNHCR programmes. Following a series of international conferences on population, social issues and women, it was essential to apply the energy invested in preparing global policies. The Executive Committee had established a policy on protection for refugee women and a policy to examine the condition of the refugees themselves and to ensure that the least vulnerable among them had access to the required protection and assistance. Beyond the establishment of policy, however, was the bigger struggle to implement policy worldwide. In that regard, UNHCR should first monitor the extent to which its own programmes implemented UNHCR policies. Secondly, it should examine the contracts it signed with implementing partners to ensure that those acting with UNHCR funding and on UNHCR's behalf were carrying out their responsibilities in accordance with the policies that the Executive Committee had approved. Thirdly, the High Commissioner should have funding to explore imaginative ways of improving policy implementation through innovative project design. Her Government would be prepared to contribute to such a fund.

83. Staff development, a second management concern, was also crucial to policy implementation. The Executive Committee had stressed the importance of people-oriented planning training, which focused on appropriate programme design according to the profile of the beneficiary population. The United States supported training of UNHCR staff within that framework. Furthermore, as a major implementor of reproductive health programmes in its bilateral development efforts, her Government was interested in helping UNHCR identify and design appropriate training modules or programmes for field staff, programme officers and NGOs. A third management concern involved the relationship between UNHCR and its implementing partners. The United States expected international NGOs to fund a portion of their own activities through their private resources, as UNHCR did. Overhead costs were a necessary part of achieving the goal of assisting refugees. UNHCR should not restrict itself to providing funding only for certain programme elements and not for others. Also, it should monitor the degree to which its implementing partners were operating according to UNHCR policies and guidelines.

84. The United States continued to support the courageous efforts of the High Commissioner's staff in the field to provide protection to those in need and appreciated the practical cooperation it received from UNHCR on protection issues in its own region. It encouraged UNHCR to work with Governments to

discuss the development of guiding principles for the provision of protection for those in need who fell outside the bounds of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

85. She wished to acknowledge UNHCR's response to her Government's suggestion the previous year that a meeting should be held on resettlement programmes. That issue was particularly important to the United States, which had resettled about 100,000 persons under its refugee admissions programme during the past fiscal year. Her Government viewed resettlement as an important component of its overall effort on behalf of refugees and played a leadership role in that aspect of refugee protection. It hoped that it would continue to meet, preferably with UNHCR, NGOs and Governments together, to discuss refugee resettlement issues. In that context, it welcomed the evaluation of its resettlement programme conducted by UNHCR and found its analysis and recommendations quite useful. It looked forward to international resettlement regaining its full place as one of the three durable solutions for refugees, in practice as well as in theory.

86. In conclusion, she paid tribute to the thousands of UNHCR and NGO staff working to improve the conditions under which refugees lived. Her Government expected to maintain a high level of financial support for those efforts in 1996 as in 1995. The world's humanitarian workers, and the world's Governments, benefited every day from the leadership of the High Commissioner, who had managed to retain a clear focus on the highest priority of her Office - the protection and assistance of refugees, regardless of their political opinions, their location or their number.

87. Mrs. RUIZ-TAGLE (Spain), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Union, congratulated the officers of the Executive Committee on their election and welcomed Bangladesh, India and the Russian Federation as new members. In a year of increasing challenges, the performance of UNHCR had been impressive and she wished to express the European Union's appreciation and support to the High Commissioner and pay tribute to the commitment of all her staff.

88. International humanitarian law and human rights continued to be brutally violated. The civilian population remained too often the target of hostilities by warring parties. Free access by humanitarian organizations to persons of concern had to be guaranteed and the manipulation of humanitarian action for political or military purposes had to be prevented. The security of humanitarian relief personnel also needed to be ensured.

89. The conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi had confronted UNHCR with one of its biggest challenges. The Bujumbura regional conference in the Great Lakes region had agreed on a plan of action favouring voluntary repatriation as the most preferred durable solution. However, most of its provisions still had to be implemented and all States should do their utmost to honour the commitments they had made at Bujumbura. The work of the tripartite commissions to accelerate repatriations was to be encouraged, but adequate conditions still needed to be ensured in the country of origin for repatriation in safety and dignity. The international community, through the round-table process, had approved the basis for a programme of national reconstruction and socio-economic rehabilitation. It was up to the Government of Rwanda to

establish the conditions for national reconciliation, including a properly functioning, independent judiciary and full respect for human rights. In that context, the recent memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the United Nations human rights field operation in Rwanda would be important. The European Union also fully supported the work of the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda.

90. The massive presence of refugees in neighbouring countries was a heavy burden, but the expulsion of refugees was not acceptable; nor should borders be closed to them. States had the responsibility to ensure the protection and security of refugees and access for humanitarian assistance. The European Union had been providing significant assistance in that regard and would continue to do so. It would further support all preventive and confidence-building measures in the region aimed at guaranteeing respect for human rights and the continuation of the political dialogue and cooperation between the various parties, in the spirit of the Arusha Agreement. The United Nations Conference on peace, security and stability in the Great Lakes region, called for by the Security Council, could contribute to forming the basis for durable solutions to the problems of that region. In addition to positive steps at the national level, there was also the need for a comprehensive and global approach to the political, economic and security issues affecting the region.

91. The Horn of Africa was also an area of concern, but there had been positive developments in Africa, all of which involved UNHCR - notably the successful process in Mozambique and the start of what might be a similarly successful process in Angola, as well as a glimmer of hope for peace in Liberia.

92. In the former Yugoslavia, there appeared to be a real possibility for a peaceful solution. The European Union wished to stress once again the important role of UNHCR as the humanitarian lead agency and the valuable work of ICRC and other humanitarian organizations and NGOs. UNPROFOR, with a major European contribution, had also played a key role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to and protection of the civilian population. To promote the return of refugees and displaced persons, the peace settlement would have to include humanitarian and human rights elements, including respect for the rights of minorities, free choice of place of residence and freedom of movement.

93. The European Union strongly condemned the disappearance of thousands of persons from Srebrenica and Zepa and urged that immediate access for the relevant international organizations should be given to the detained persons from those areas, as well as full information on the fate of those not accounted for. It also condemned the expulsions from Banja Luka, the atrocities in Krajina and the shellings of a refugee centre near Tuzla and of Sarajevo. The European Union was also seriously concerned about measures recently taken by Croatia, such as the revocation of refugee status for certain Bosnian refugees, the forced relocation of refugees from Banja Luka in the Bihac area, as well as the property decree. It called on the parties to comply fully with their international obligations in order not to jeopardize the chances of peace and reconciliation.

94. Even if peace came immediately, humanitarian needs in the short term would still have to be met prior to or in parallel with planning for rehabilitation and reconstruction. The International Management Group (IMG), with the basic support of the European Union and UNHCR, was already present in the field, working on the rehabilitation of infrastructures, and would be able to provide significant help. Discussions on the form and nature of broader assistance were continuing, but the international community, including the international financial institutions, would have a key role to play. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms would be a precondition for all such assistance.

95. The European Union believed that international protection remained the central pillar of UNHCR's mandate and wished to express its appreciation and support for UNHCR's work in that area. The 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol continued to be the key legal instruments for the international protection of refugees. The European Union called on all States to implement them fully and urged those that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to them. At the same time, it fully recognized the value and importance of regional arrangements and instruments, both for prevention and for addressing specific protection needs.

96. The European Union shared UNHCR's continuing interest in exploring measures to ensure that adequate protection was granted to all those who needed it. While recalling the primary responsibility of States, it also agreed on the importance of international solidarity in assuring protection, especially in developing countries with a significant presence of refugees. It was ready to continue working with UNHCR to make that protection more secure, consistent and predictable.

97. The primary victims in situations of mass displacements continued to be children, women and the elderly. The European Union stressed once again their need for special protection and commended UNHCR on its efforts to strengthen its capacity to meet better the needs of those particularly vulnerable groups. Regarding internally displaced persons, it appealed to all parties in conflict to adhere to the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law. It welcomed and supported UNHCR's activities on behalf of stateless persons and encouraged it to continue devoting special attention to that core issue and to increasing its protection of stateless persons or persons facing the risk of becoming stateless due to the dissolution of States.

98. The European Union welcomed the outcome of efforts to reform the working methods of the governing bodies, as well as the outcome of the informal consultations on budgetary issues, and looked forward to speedy implementation of those reforms. It trusted that the reforms would give the Executive Committee greater opportunities to exercise oversight and governance in relation to General and Special Programmes and to the question of the efficiency of UNHCR operations. Recent reports concerning oversight had highlighted a number of administrative and managerial challenges facing UNHCR, including the office's relations with its implementing partners. The European Union would encourage UNHCR to deal with those issues as a matter of priority and looked forward to inter-sessional discussion on UNHCR's response.

99. The discussions on the budget structure had been very useful in promoting understanding of the concerns of donors, recipients and UNHCR, and the European Union hoped that the suggested changes would provide the High Commissioner with the necessary flexibility to respond effectively and quickly to operational needs. Budgetary requirements for 1996 would most likely again be a challenge to the donor community. The European Union would continue to provide UNHCR with substantial financial support and called on Governments to contribute generously to UNHCR's programmes. In that context, the European Union stressed the importance of broadening the donor base and of achieving a fairer burden-sharing.

100. There had been important work in other areas, such as on human resources management, on emergency preparedness and response and in the fields of emergency training and service packages.

101. The European Union appreciated the work of the Secretariat in the preparatory process for the regional conference on refugees, returnees, displaced persons and related migratory movements in the Commonwealth of Independent States and neighbouring countries. It would continue to support actively that intergovernmental process and hoped that it would provide a framework for adequate cooperation in the future.

102. There was a need for detailed discussion on a concerted strategy for further improvements in emergency management at a broader level. Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 called for a comprehensive and analytical review of the capacity of the United Nations system to provide humanitarian assistance. The European Union was ready to participate actively in that process and hoped to be addressing all the relevant issues in the new Standing Committee.

103. Aware of the important and growing role of NGOs in humanitarian assistance and their increased involvement as implementing partners, the European Union welcomed the ongoing consultation process between UNHCR and NGOs within the framework of the PARinAC process. It encouraged UNHCR to strengthen its interaction with NGOs, in particular to improve the accountability of the NGOs working as UNHCR's implementing partners.

104. In conclusion, she reiterated the European Union's support of UNHCR and particularly its work in assisting the return and reintegration of refugees to the point where non-emergency actors could take over. It was to be hoped that, in the coming year, the resolution of at least some of the current emergencies would mean that UNHCR's positive work in that area would attract the attention of the world media.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.